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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 004274

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [SY](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: UNHCR SEEKING ACCESS TO DETAINED AHWAZIS, SOLUTION
FOR STRANDED IRAQI PALESTINIANS

REF: A. DAMASCUS 4026

[1](#)B. DAMASCUS 2391

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.4 b/d

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: UNHCR Damascus has stepped up efforts to gain access to three Iranian Ahwazis, who are recognized refugees and who are believed to be in detention in Damascus, despite press reports about their extradition back to Iran, according to senior UNHCR protection officer Dietrun Gunther.

Intensive diplomatic efforts by Norway and UNHCR in Geneva and Tehran may have saved the life of another Iranian Ahwazi recognized refugee and Norwegian passport holder, who was sent back to Iran from Syria earlier this year because of Syria's growing ties with Iran, and efforts continue on behalf of a 60-year-old Dutch national and recognized Iranian Ahwazi refugee, who was also extradited, Gunther said. So far, UNHCR Damascus has submitted 40 Iranian Ahwazi cases for resettlement and is processing another 30 cases, with Ahwazis here reporting they are under tremendous pressure by both Syrian and locally-based Iranian intelligence officers, Gunther said. Separately, a 14-year-old Iraqi Palestinian boy died in an accident in the no-man's-land at the Tanf crossing between Iraq and Syria. UNHCR is requesting SARG permission to move all of the 346 Palestinian Iraqis in the no-man's land to UNHCR's El Hol camp in northeastern Syria and is developing a proposal to try and resettle the no-man's-land population and the 302 currently at El Hol, Gunther said. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) AHWAZIS: UNHCR-Damascus has stepped up efforts in recent days to gain access to three Iranian Ahwazis, who are recognized refugees and who are believed to be in detention in Damascus, despite press reports about their extradition back to Iran (reftel A), according to Gunther. The three refugees are Gamal Obeidy, a 34-year-old student at Damascus University, and brothers Taher Ali and Abdulrasoul Ali Mazrae, who have been accepted for resettlement in Sweden and Norway, Gunther said. The wife of one of the refugees received a credible report of a sighting of her husband in Damascus, and a Syrian lawyer hired by UNHCR could find no record of any of the three having left the country, Gunther said. After repeated unsuccessful requests to meet with the three refugees in detention, UNHCR has now asked to see them in a less sensitive location to arrange travel to their countries of resettlement, Gunther said. If the Syrian MFA does not agree to this request by the end of the week, UNHCR headquarters in Geneva may make a public statement calling for their release, Gunther said.

13. (C) Intensive efforts by Norway and the UNHCR may have saved the life of another Iranian Ahwazi recognized refugee and Norwegian passport holder, Saeed Saki, who was sent back to Iran from Syria earlier this year (reftel B) where he was to have been executed in July, Gunther said. Reports suggest that Saki is still alive in a detention center in Khuzestan Province in Iran, she said. Diplomatic efforts continue on behalf of 60-year-old Dutch national and recognized Iranian Ahwazi refugee, Faleh Abdullah al-Mansouri, who was sent back to Iran in early May, Gunther said. The SARG apparently extradited Mansouri to Iran in early May but waited three months to inform the Dutch Embassy in Damascus, she said. It is unclear why the SARG waited to inform the Embassy, although the regime may not have been immediately aware of Mansouri's Dutch nationality since he entered Syria on his Iranian passport, which was included on an Interpol arrest warrants list, she said.

14. (C) In all, UNHCR Damascus has submitted 40 Iranian Ahwazi cases for resettlement, mostly to Nordic countries, but also including four cases to the U.S., Gunther said. Twenty-five of the 40 cases, including Saki's, were accepted for resettlement, Gunther said. UNHCR is processing on an expedited basis 30 more cases, said Gunther, who repeated Ahwazis' claims that they are under tremendous pressure by both Syrian and Iranian intelligence officers operating here.

(Note: The Ahwazi issue is clearly sensitive here because of Syria's growing ties with Iran and the SARG's desire to respond to Iranian pressure on the issue. Syrian state security officers went on August 22 to the law office of a young activist lawyer, Rezanne Zeituneh, questioning her about articles on her human rights web site--www.shril.info--and, especially, about news pertaining

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to the detention of Iranian Ahwazis in Syria. The security officers asserted that the articles were false, said Zeituneh, adding that a Political Security official called her August 23 to ask for the web site's address. End Note.)

15. (C) IRAQI-PALESTINIANS: Separately, Gunther reported the August 28 accidental death of a 14-year-old Iraqi Palestinian boy in the no-man's-land at the Tanf crossing between Iraq and Syria. The boy, who was the only son of a family with seven children, was accidentally hit by a truck, Gunther said. The family has obtained special permission by the SARG to bury their son in Damascus but will have to return to the no-man's-land, she said. The boy was from a group of 73 Iraqi Palestinians in the no-man's-land close to the Iraqi border, which was to have joined a second larger group of 274 Palestinians in the middle of the several-kilometers-wide no-man's-land, Gunther said. The commotion of the accident had so far prevented a merger of the two groups, she said. On August 29, UNHCR sent the SARG a letter requesting permission to move all of the 346 Palestinian Iraqi's from two locations in the no-man's land to UNHCR's El Hol camp in a remote area of northeastern Syria, Gunther said. UNHCR is also working on a proposal, including resettlement options, for the 346 persons currently in the no-man's-land and the 302 currently at El Hol, she said.

CORBIN